

the womb like when she'd yank my hand in time to save me from being run over by a car. She screamed at me all afternoon from her room how I'd ruined it for her, and would again, and I screamed back how sick I was of all this — the bedpans, the morphine, my keeping her alive for her to wish she'd die. Such ingratitude! We both wept till dinnertime.

While I fed her dessert of ice cream, she cleared her throat, letting me know more was to come, but she apologized instead, thanked me for saving her life. "I know now how much you really must love me," she said, "to save this old bag of worthless bones." Then she laughed for the first time in a long, long time. I wanted to hug her, but I couldn't for her pain. I'd never hug her, I knew, ever again, but it felt good to both of us when I cooled her bruises with a little witch-hazel-soaked cotton swab.

ME AND MY MOTHER'S MORPHINE

Deukmejian and the DEA, my mother's doctor says, keep close tabs on Californians' medical morphine use, so I must drive five miles once a week to fetch in person. The Triplicate, a beige, crisp piece of paper, as dear as a cashier's check, to take five miles the other side of town to the only pharmacy that carries my mother's liquid morphine. On the way, I stop at Trader Joe's for mine, the California kind: green syringes of sauvignon blanc, chablis, chardonnay, Sebastiani Eye of the Swan I later sip from a plastic cup to blur Life while I spoonfeed my bedridden mother her supper.

"Now I know why you drink wine," she says, a teetotaler, a good Christian woman who's never approved of my drinking. "Being doped up brings you closer to God," she says, seeing Sistine things now upon her ceiling, fidgeting and licking her lips, the one-half cubic centimeter of morphine, the same color blue as Windex,

I give her mornings and bedtime in apple juice more potent to her 70 pounds than a \$100 heroin hit to a prickled L.A. hype.

Sad and ashamed of her addiction as much as her disease, sometimes she weeps as she sucks through a straw the last drop of morphine from the cup, and sometimes I imagine Deukmejian and the DEA boys breaking down my mother's bedroom door — conquistadores roaring "Eureka!" — coming to prick their spears at us, a couple pagans all right, red-eyed and doped-up, naked with sin and death.

SUBSEQUENCE

My prospective employer asks me about the 3 years on my job app that I didn't work, instead took care of my dying, bedridden mother, and he frowns, suspicious that I am lazy as well as unskilled on Wordstar and Word Perfect, my job duties as nurse and nurturer of no use to him, nor that I learned to butter toast to the edges, just so, and then cut bite-size for her, nor that I perfected cream and barley soups to add fat to her tiny bones, came to know Duoderm, decubitus ulcers, catheters, and morphine, and developed my communication skills so as to articulate with paramedics and intensive-care personnel.

Once I ran the mile in a minute when I heard the hospital intercom cry "Code Blue!" to find where she lay inside the CAT Scan, but my prospective employer wants someone quicker who can field invoices, push paper into their proper pink, green, and goldenrod places, catch faxes and the phones, then slide safe into home after the grand slam.

Next time, I will lie on my job app and resume, make up some made-up